N. L. Dalmia®
Institute of Management
Studies and Research
(A School of Excellence of N. L. Dalmia Educational Society)

Finale Round Guidelines

1. Competition Overview

The **Decode X – 2026 Finale Round** is a multi-stage, data-driven analytical challenge designed to test:

- Analytical Rigor
- Optimization Under Constraints
- Strategic Decision-Making
- Systems Thinking
- Executive-Level Communication

The finale simulates a real-world advisory environment where teams must **diagnose, adapt, and recommend under evolving conditions**.

This is not a static analytics exercise.
It is a structural reasoning simulation.

2. Structure of the Finale

- The finale consists of **5 distinct case areas**.
- Teams will be randomly assigned a **Case Number**.
- Each case operates independently.
- The **Top 2 teams from each case** qualify for the Jury Round.
- A total of 10 finalist teams will be selected.
- Only the **Top team from each case** will present before the Jury Panel.
- The **Top 3 teams overall**, across all cases, will be declared winners.

3. Competition Timeline

Start:
📅 28 February 2026 – 11:00 AM

Final Submission Deadline:
📅 01 March 2026 – 9:00 AM

Total Duration:
22 continuous hours

All work must be completed strictly within this window.
Late submissions will not be evaluated.

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4. Stage Structure (Evolving Case Design)

The finale consists of three structured stages, with an interim structural checkpoint.

All case materials will be shared via **OneDrive link (case-specific).**

🔷 **Stage 1 – Baseline Case Release**

📅 28 February | 11:00 AM

Teams will receive:

- Assigned Case Number
- Business Context Brief
- Historical Dataset
- Submission Instructions

Teams are expected to:

- Frame the business problem
- Diagnose performance
- Identify key drivers
- Build analytical models
- Propose an initial strategy

🔷 **Stage 2 – Regime Shift**

📅 28 February | 7:00 PM

Each case will receive a **case-specific structural shock**, which may include:

- Policy change
- Cost structure revision
- Demand shift
- Regulatory intervention
- Capital or operational constraint

Updated data or revised parameters will be shared.

Teams must:

- Reassess earlier conclusions
- Recalibrate models
- Re-optimize strategy
- Quantify impact

No business interpretation clarifications will be provided at this stage.

◆ Stage 2 Interim Submission (Mandatory)

📅 28 February | 11:00 PM

Following the Stage 2 Regime Shift, all teams must submit an interim structural recalibration brief.

This submission evaluates:

- Structural shock diagnosis
- Model recalibration discipline
- Quantified impact assessment
- Trade-off recognition
- Preparedness for Stage 3 optimization

This is not a final solution submission.
It is a structured reasoning checkpoint.

Interim Submission Requirements

All interim submissions must be emailed before:

🕐 11:00 PM | 28 February 2026
📧 decodex.cases@nldalmia.edu.in

📌 Subject Line Format (Strictly Follow):
DECODE-X Stage 2 | Team Name | Case Number

Example:
DECODE-X Stage 2 | Alpha Analytics | Case 03

Incorrect subject formatting may lead to administrative rejection.

Mandatory Attachment (Stage 2)

📄 Stage 2 Structural Recalibration Brief
(Maximum 5 Slides | PDF Format Only)

Must include:

1️⃣ Shock Diagnosis
2️⃣ Model Recalibration Summary
3️⃣ Impact Quantification (Before vs After)
4️⃣ Trade-Off Identification
5️⃣ Stage 3 Optimization Direction (no final answers)

Final constraint solutions must NOT be included.

Stage 3 directives will be released after this submission.

◆ Stage 3 – Final Board Directive

📅 01 March | 1:00 AM

Each case will receive a Confidential Board-Level Directive introducing:

- A binding constraint, or
- A revised performance objective, or
- A financial/operational threshold requirement

This directive is case-specific and must be incorporated into the final recommendation.

No clarifications will be provided.

5. Clarification Policy

Clarifications will be accepted only between:

📅 28 February | 11:00 AM – 01:00 PM

After 01:00 PM:

- No business interpretation clarifications will be entertained.
- Only genuine data inconsistencies or technical errors may be raised.
- All assumptions and interpretations remain the responsibility of the team.

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6. Final Deliverables

All final submissions must be emailed before:

🕐 9:00 AM | 01 March 2026

📩 decodex.cases@nldalmia.edu.in

📌 Subject Line Format (Strictly Follow):

DECODE-X Finale | Team Name | Case Number

Example:
DECODE-X Finale | Alpha Analytics | Case 03

Incorrect subject formatting may lead to administrative rejection.

Mandatory Attachments

1️⃣ Executive Board Presentation (Max 15 Slides)

Must include:

- Problem framing
- Baseline diagnosis
- Post-shock analysis
- Optimization logic
- Final recommendation
- Risk & sensitivity

2️⃣ Technical Appendix (Max 10 Pages)

Must include:

- Model specifications
- Assumptions
- Methodology
- Validation approach
- Sensitivity analysis

3️⃣ One-Page Decision Memo (Mandatory)

Must clearly state:

- What fundamentally changed after the regime shift?
- What trade-offs were accepted?
- What final decision is recommended?
- What risks remain?

🔢 Stage 2 Interim Submission

The Stage 2 Structural Recalibration Brief (submitted at 11:00 PM) forms part of the evaluation record.

The jury may evaluate:

- Logical evolution from Stage 2 to Stage 3
- Structural consistency
- Adaptation discipline
- Transparency of trade-offs

Teams must defend continuity of reasoning during Jury Round.

🔢 Supporting Model/Code Files (Optional but Encouraged)

Black-box outputs without explanation will be penalized.

7. Evaluation Criteria

Criteria	Weight
Analytical Depth	25%
Re-Optimization Under Shock	20%
Decision Logic & Trade-Off Clarity	25%
Systems Thinking	15%
Business Communication	15%

8. AI & Tool Usage Policy

This is an open-book competition.

- Python, R, SQL, Excel, AI tools permitted.
- Major tools used must be declared.
- Black-box outputs without explanation will be penalized.
- Jury members may question modeling assumptions and logic.
- Teams must independently defend their analysis.

9. Academic Integrity

- Plagiarism and similarity checks may be conducted.
- Excessive similarity may result in disqualification.
- All submitted work must be original.
- No revisions will be accepted after submission.

10. Jury Round

The Top team from each case will present before the Jury Panel.

Presentation Format:

- 20 minutes presentation

- 10 minutes Q&A

The Top 3 teams overall will be declared winners.

Closing Note

Decode X – 2026 is designed to test:

Diagnosis → Adaptation → Constrained Optimization

Stage 1 tests analytical foundation.
Stage 2 tests recalibration discipline.
Stage 3 tests structural judgment under constraint.

Consistency of reasoning matters as much as correctness.